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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a brief overview of planning and implementing a project to fund library automation. It is suggested that: (1) proposal budgets should include all costs of a project, such as furniture needed for computer terminals, costs for modifying library procedures, initial supplies, or ongoing maintenance; (2) automation does not save money, it improves services, and the focus of the proposal should be on the latter; (3) cooperative projects are attractive, especially to local funders; (4) the parent institution should be approached first for funding; if funds are not available from this source, determine what restrictions, if any, the parent institution places on independent fund raising; (5) potential funders include public and private organizations, groups that have given to libraries in the past, and groups that provide support to institutions within the same geographical area as the library; (6) library friends groups are a source of financial support, and individual members may be able to help make contacts with funders; (7) the process of seeking external funds often clarifies library needs and provides an opportunity to educate and excite library users about the library and the potential for automation; and (8) a successful search for funding for library automation can create opportunities and contacts for future funding projects. (Contains 3 references.) (KRN)

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FUNDING FOR LIBRARY AUTOMATION

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The challenge for most libraries is not whether to acquire new technologies, but to identify funding for start-up costs, especially library automation.

Planning

Planning is the first step in realizing the goal of library automation--not the kind of evaluation and planning to identify and select the automation system, but planning as it relates to funding (Burlingame, p. 50). In some cases, a library will have moved through a very formal process, perhaps working with a consultant, to identify and select an automation system.

From a funding point of view, it is important to be inclusive in the project that is finally outlined. For example, the proposed budget should include the necessary furniture stands for terminals or computers, as well as any costs incurred to modify existing procedures, such as changing the patron ID system to support automated circulation. To the extent possible, initial supplies and ongoing maintenance should be calculated. A library automation system will never have as much funding appeal as it does when it is new and a funding request is made for the first time. It is important, therefore, to meet as much of the funding need for as long as possible.

Institutional support for the concept of automation is critical, regardless of the source or sources of funding for the project. If funding is sought from external sources, there will need to be assurances, usually in writing, that the institution will support ongoing maintenance and needed upgrades.

Regardless of whether funds will be sought from internal or external sources, a written proposal will need to be developed early in the process. Such a proposal should include background information, a description of the project and its anticipated results, a summary of who will benefit, timetables, key personnel, and budget information. Such a document should be viewed as dynamic, with frequent revisions expected if funding is sought externally. Use round numbers and budget generously. Finally, do not attempt to demonstrate cost savings. Automating libraries does not save money; it improves services (Moran, p. 38).

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Cooperative Projects

Cooperative projects for automation have real advantages. At the same time, they require enormous amounts of energy, patience, and a spirit of compromise. Cooperative automation projects among libraries that have a history of other cooperative arrangements, such as reciprocal borrowing and resource sharing, can result in a system that is more useful to patrons and library staff alike. In most cases, one or two individuals will need to take responsibility for leading a fund-raising appeal on behalf of all the libraries involved.

A cooperative project will often have greater appeal to external funding sources. This is especially true of local corporate donors who can make a grant without concern that every library in the community will expect an equal gift.

Funding Opportunities

A plan for funding and implementation of automation should be presented first to the library's parent institution. If the city government or college administration has funds and interest in expediting the project, external fund raising may not be necessary. Competition among communities and institutions of higher education may motivate institutional funding of all or part of a library automation project.

If, however, a library finds only encouragement and no funding from its parent institution, opportunities are still available. There are numerous granting agencies, both public and private, that have indicated interest in library automation by making awards in these areas. The community can be tapped for support from businesses, patrons, alumni, or friends groups. It is important to determine what restrictions, if any, a parent institution places on fund raising efforts and to communicate the library's activities in this area on a regular basis to the appropriate individuals.

Granting Agencies

There are a variety of agencies that present opportunities for procuring funds for library automation. They include agencies that distribute public funds through federal and state programs, agencies that distribute funds through private foundations, corporate giving programs, and service organizations.

When reviewing potential granting agencies, several factors must be considered, including the scope of projects funded to date and whether any of those awards were to libraries directly or for library-related activities. If the agency has funded libraries in the past, were such awards restricted based on library type--

academic, special, public?

Public granting agency guidelines are usually very specific about what they will and will not fund. For example, the Department of Education Title II-D program was designed to encourage the acquisition of technological equipment to enhance services in academic libraries. Several LSCA (Library Services and Construction Act) programs provide opportunities for funding to improve public library services through a system of state regrants.

Private granting agencies should not be dismissed from consideration just because there is no record of funding to libraries. If the library is within the region that they fund and the project meets general interest guidelines, a letter or phone call of inquiry may be appropriate.

For some granting agencies, geographical location is used to screen the requests that are considered. For other agencies, geographical location may be a bonus, if the request originates from a state or region that is considered under-represented in previous award action.

All granting agencies have guidelines for the expenses they will and will not fund when considering proposals. For example, some agencies will not fund personnel costs or equipment purchases. In some cases, agencies also dictate certain types of activities in funded projects. In addition, agencies provide information relating to the amount of awards--average amount of award and/or range of award amounts. This is useful information to insure that the amount requested is appropriate for the agency.

The source of funds used for making awards may be inconsistent and, therefore, it is useful to insure that a granting agency is still actively awarding funds. Most agencies have published guidelines that indicate the special areas of consideration when selecting recipients for awards. It is critical for the request narrative to emphasize how these considerations relate to a proposed project. In addition, it is important to review any published statement that discusses broad funding goals for a granting agency and to consider how these goals are met by a library's proposal to automate.

The granting process is one of deadlines and timetables. It is necessary to consider whether the proposed automation project can be accommodated within the deadline, review, and notification process. In addition, if an award is received, are there time factors for completion and will the automation project work within those time constraints?

A personal contact with a representative of the granting agency may both clarify questions that are raised in reviewing published information and allow an opportunity to discuss library

automation as a possibility for funding (Thompson, 329-30).

Publications by The Foundation Center or a customized search of their online databases will facilitate the identification of granting agencies with a record of funding projects either for libraries or in specific geographical regions, as well as providing some of the other information noted as critical for creating a strong proposal.

Community Support

Large businesses in a community may have formal granting agencies that make awards for projects. Other businesses may make gifts based on local decisions and available funds. In most cases, requests for funding from local businesses should begin with a personal visit to describe the project and to deliver a one- or two-page summary of the project and budget.

If the project is a cooperative venture, representatives from at least two of the institutions should make the personal visit together. If possible, a librarian should be accompanied by a college president or board member. The first local business to be approached should be chosen carefully. If a business with ties to the library or a known record of philanthropy is persuaded to support the project with a financial commitment, other local businesses are more likely to respond. For some business leaders, the opportunity to make the first gift within the community is a positive incentive to contribute and to challenge others to do the same. Before the personal visit is concluded, agree on a time and procedure to receive the decision.

If a library has an organized friends group, library automation will be an appropriate fund-raising project to suggest to the membership. In most cases, a friends group would not be expected to raise all the needed funds; however, their commitment will strengthen grant applications and direct appeals within the community. Key members of a friends group, influential library patrons, or alumni should be identified to assist in writing letters of support for grant applications or contacting potential donors either informally or as a partner with a librarian for a formal presentation.

Conclusion

Librarians may prefer parent institutions with the financial strength to absorb the costs for projects such as automation. Raising external funds will delay the implementation of such a project, however, there are a number of advantages. The process of requesting funds externally often clarifies the needs of the library, while making contacts with granting agencies and community

members on behalf of the library. The process of fund raising provides an opportunity to educate and excite current and potential library users about the potential of automation and the variety of services offered by the library. An automation system that has had wide funding support may become a symbol of community achievement and pride. Success in fund raising for a library automation system will create opportunities and contacts for future library projects.

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